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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MILAN 000172

SIPDIS

STATE FOR S/P GREG BEHRMAN

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [IT](#)  
SUBJECT: 2G,S - NORTHERN ITALIAN MUSLIMS WITHOUT A COUNTRY  
- FOLLOW UP TO THE CAIRO SPEECH

REF: A. REF A: STATE 71325  
[1](#)B. REF B: ROME 437  
[1](#)C. REF C: ROME 438  
[1](#)D. REF D: ROME 439  
[1](#)E. REF E: ROME 877

Classified By: CG CAROL PEREZ FOR REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D)

1.(C) Summary: Despite the largely positive response to the President,s Cairo speech, the lingering question that remains for some is &Now what?8 In an effort to continue the dialogue begun as a result of that address, we met with contributors to Yalla Italia, a monthly editorial project for &2G,s8 or second- generation Italian Muslims, based in Milan. The purpose of the meeting was to gain insight into the social, political, and economic hurdles faced by 2G,s and brainstorm on ideas of how we can help address the difficulties of identity and integration. End summary.

#### LINK BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

[1](#)2. (SBU) In response to Ref A request, we,ve begun to canvass local contacts to gauge the response in Milan and northern Italy to the President,s Cairo speech and to brainstorm on ways forward. We recently met with contributors to &Yalla Italia,8 a monthly magazine supplement first published in May 2007 by a group of eight young Italian Muslims of Arab origin and an Italian-Christian editor-in-chief. Yalla Italia has a combined monthly circulation and website viewership of over 200,000 and has 20 contributors, the majority of whom are women, and all of whom are &2G,s8 (&second generation8 immigrants). Their aim is to introduce Italians to the cultures of the Muslim members of their community and to assist Muslim immigrants in the navigation of their dual identities. Their work is getting international notice in newspapers like the New York Times and on Muslim-oriented websites like Euro-Islam.info, which receives 50,000 unique hits per month.

[1](#)3. (C) The theme of the meeting, and of previous encounters with immigrant civil society groups (see Refs B, C, and D), is the plight of the 2G,s. According to the director of Yalla Italia, one of the greatest frustrations of these second generation immigrants is the bureaucratic disaster that is the Italian citizenship process. For most, their parents arrived in Italy in the early 1970s at a time when their migration was more about expanding their horizons than escaping their circumstances. Their children were born and raised in Italy but can not apply for citizenship until they are 18 years old. These 2G,s may have citizenship in an Arab nation through their parents but they are not citizens in the only country they have ever called home. According to the GOI provisions on nationality, once this type of application for citizenship is begun, the GOI sets no required completion date for the process. Among those working for Yalla Italia, including one writer who received his citizenship 3 years after submitting his application, the shortest completion time in their experience has been between

2 and 4 years, with some waiting as long as 10 to 12 years to obtain their citizenship.

NO MAN,S LAND

¶4. (C) Young Italians across the board are finding it difficult to gain employment in Italy,s current economy. That said, according to those in the Yalla Italia group, that challenge is even greater for 2G,s as they are not citizens and it is difficult for those of Arab descent to receive work visas. In addition, as laid out in official GOI materials, an employer interested in hiring a non-Italian citizen faces a daunting and arduous process that includes multiple documentation requirements and applications. Thus, while these 2G non-citizens may have excellent skills and an extensive Italian education, they feel they cannot utilize either in a meaningful way. Yalla,s director stressed that as a result of this economic marginalization, many 2G,s have to rely more and longer upon their parents, who are often far more traditional in their practices. Our Yalla contacts noted that many of those 2G,s who are in contact with the publication express a frustration that they have no place in the Italian community.

¶5. (C) One of the strong concerns of the meeting participants is that this type of &rejection8 by the broader Italian community breeds discontent and may lead 2G,s away from integration and toward more extremist margins of society that would welcome their talents with open arms. As one Yalla contributor told us, the 2G,s human capital goes untapped in Italy and their alternatives are limited despite their education and ambition.

A FRIEND IN THE UNITED STATES

¶6. (C) While they may feel shunned by the government in the country of their birth, those with whom we met universally

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praised President Obama,s speech in Cairo. Some, like a blogger on the Yalla staff, see it as a new direction for the U.S. government toward a stronger relationship between Islam and America. Those portions that seemed to resonate most strongly with the group were the references to the historic co-existence and cooperation between Islam and the West and the &forgotten8 contributions of Islam to nations outside the Middle East. Each of the Yalla group described suffering indignities they attribute to media-driven misperceptions following September 11th. There was a sense of vindication when the President called for an end to using the word Muslim as a synonym for terrorist. There was also hope that since President Obama could make a distinction between the majority of Muslims who practice their faith and culture in peace and the minority of violent extremists, others can begin to as well. The speech renewed the faith of the contacts we spoke with that the United States will lead other nations toward better relations with the Muslim world. They are looking to the United States to set an example of tolerance and acceptance for Italy to follow.

A COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN ITALY

¶7. (C) With one-third of the country,s land mass and roughly half its population, northern Italy is also home to the nation,s greatest concentration of immigrants. Over 62% of the country,s legal immigrants reside in the region, giving the 2G,s we spoke with a community, if not a country. However, strength in this case does not necessarily come in numbers. Though anti-immigrant rhetoric is evident across party lines these days, the country,s most openly anti-immigration political party, the Northern League, is firmly rooted in the north. The League,s rhetoric appeared to find resonance with voters in recent European and local elections even beyond their usual strongholds in the north (Ref E). With recent election successes and vigorous campaigning expected leading up to the spring 2010 regional elections, we expect anti-immigrant rhetoric to continue to expand north of the Po River.

COMMENT: NOW WHAT?

¶8. (C) While the members of the group were impressed with the President,s use of Arabic words and references to Islamic history in the Cairo speech, the director of Yalla Italia expressed a concern that &the wind is different but the

direction is the same;8 that the same challenges face this administration that did the last and that the eloquent words may be forgotten when it is time to act. Of the broader engagement themes the President mentioned, our contacts expressed a need for increased opportunities for longer and more substantive cultural, educational, and professional exchanges. One example of our efforts to support such exchanges is with the International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP). Currently, the opposition leader of the Democratic Party at the Milan City Council is traveling in the United States as part of an IVLP focused on immigration and integration issues. He wrote an article on immigrant assistance centers in the United States, which was published recently in the left-leaning La Repubblica (Italy,s second-largest daily newspaper). He is calling for a similar center in Milan managed by and for immigrants. This may be the type of change of direction that 2G,s seek, but that would require the support of local governments ) no guarantee in Milan or other major northern cities. Meanwhile, we will continue to work with local contacts to seek logical programming ideas within the President,s three areas of engagement.

PEREZ